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SUBJECT: SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH BISHOP IRINEJ ON PATRIARCH'S
SUCCESSION

REF: BELGRADE 1560

Summary

1. (SBU) Novi Sad Bishop Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church spoke to the DCM on November 21 about successors to Patriarch Pavle, who is ill, naming Metropolitan Amfilohije as a likely candidate. Irinej said SOC would need a dynamic new patriarch who could both command the same authority as his predecessors and modernize the church. Pavle's funeral and burial would be in Belgrade, not in Kosovo, though there would be a memorial service, in the Pec Patriarchate. Irinej expected governmental, in addition to religious, delegations from abroad to attend and agreed the Russians would send a high-level official. Irinej said the church very much would welcome a high-level USG delegation. End Summary.

Confirming Patriarch's Grave Illness

2. (SBU) Bishop Irinej Bulovic, Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) Bishop of Novi Sad and Backa, spoke to the DCM about Patriarch Pavle's illness (reftel) and likely successors on November 21. He acknowledged that the Patriarch was very ill and Metropolitan Amfilohije, recently appointed by the SOC government to "assist" Pavle, was carrying out the daily responsibilities of the Patriarch.

Challenges for the Next Patriarch

3. (SBU) Irinej said the church needed to modernize and would need a dynamic new Patriarch to address SOC's challenges. The position of patriarch, lacking the universal authority of the Vatican within the Roman Catholic Church, depended on the personal authority of the man in the position. Pavle's shoes would be hard to fill. In reality, very few bishops possessed the experience for candidacy. Amfilohije had the experience, Irinej said, as did Vasilije. In response to DCM's comments about Vasilije's role in blessing Bosnian Serb Army troops during the war there, Irinej said there were other candidates under consideration.

Funeral in Belgrade, not Kosovo

4. (SBU) Irinej said the funeral and burial of Pavle would take place in St. Marko in Belgrade, not in Pec, the SOC's historical seat in Kosovo. Irinej said all patriarchs had been buried in Pec until death of the previous Patriarch, German, who died in 1987, and was buried at St. Marko instead. There would be a memorial service for Pavle in Pec, and the investiture of the new patriarch would be there as well. Irinej confirmed that SOC expected high-level governmental delegations from abroad, in addition to religious representatives, to attend the funeral in Belgrade. He welcomed the suggestion that the USG also send a delegation.

Comment

18. (SBU) Irinej was cordial and open about the need for the Church to modernize. Observers cite him as one of the more progressive bishops, despite his close ties to Milosevic. Although observers consider him a frontrunner to succeed Pavle (reftel), he did not mention himself, possibly out of modesty or because he did not want to discuss the political aspects of the succession--or possibly he does not want to take on Amfilohije yet. Irinej's comments that the Serbian Orthodox Church expects political delegations at Pavle's funeral and welcoming of a USG delegation are positive signs. End Comment.

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